

Passmores School and Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115218
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326151
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	859
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Beashel
Headteacher	Mr Vic Goddard
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	Tendring Road Harlow Essex CM18 6RW
Telephone number	01279 770800
Fax number	01279 445515

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Passmores School and Technology College has grown rapidly in the last two years, mainly as a result of students moving to it following the closure of another school. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is similar to that found nationally. However there is a greater proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including statements of special educational needs, than found nationally. There is a smaller than average proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, including those for whom English is an additional language.

The school has specialist status for technology.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Passmores School provides an outstanding education for its students. As a result, the progress they make in their academic work is outstanding. Their personal development is good, and in some respects outstanding. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. The proportion who expressed any criticism at all to inspectors was tiny. The school is succeeding despite the relatively high number of students joining at times other than at the beginning of Year 7, and some difficulties in the recruitment of teaching staff. It is an indication of the strength of the school that, during this time, it has continued to make significant improvements.

The leadership of the school is very strong and leadership and management overall are outstanding. The conviction that all students should be well cared for and should prosper both personally and in their academic work is powerful. Their views are sought regularly, as are those of parents and teachers. A number of good initiatives have been introduced as a result.

Students learn very well because they receive good quality teaching, the curriculum is outstanding: catering especially well for the range of students, and because students are exceptionally well cared for, guided and supported. The curriculum provides very good opportunities for those students who are academically strong through, for example, the opportunity to take some examinations early. There are, however, not always enough opportunities for some to be stretched in lessons. For those who are more interested in a practical approach to learning there are opportunities to study in a work context, off-site. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of healthy living. This, supported by changes to the catering service, has helped students to eat more healthily, and there is more than the government's recommended time for physical education. In addition, good numbers of students attend the large number of after school sports clubs. The result is that students' healthiness is good. They also have an outstanding understanding of how to stay safe, helped by the emphasis placed, for example, on drugs education and also by the work of departments such as technology and science in helping students to think about risks associated with equipment and chemicals. Students make an outstanding contribution to the community. Some bilingual learners work with primary school children for whom English is an additional language, for example.

Each student has a set of target grades and their progress towards those grades is monitored frequently. For those who are not keeping up there are a variety of ways in which they are helped. These include talking over problems affecting work with an adult and attending an after school homework club.

Although students' enjoyment of school is outstanding, confirmed by what parents and students told inspectors, their attendance is only satisfactory. This is mostly because of a small, but significant number of pupils, including some who have recently arrived at the school, who are persistently absent. The school managers who have responsibility in this area are working conscientiously to bring about improvements.

The school's specialist status has a positive effect on the use of information and communication technology across the whole school. New equipment is used extensively and students make good progress. As a result of the specialism, there are excellent opportunities for students to contribute very positively to their community. For example Year 10 and Year 11 students work with younger children in local primary schools. Students' preparation for their future working life is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the attendance of the small minority of students who are frequently absent.
- Ensure that all lessons regularly cater for the different abilities of students in the class.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The standards reached by students before they join the school in Year 7, are below national averages. The results of the national tests and GCSE examinations for 2007 show that by the end of Year 9 they make at least good progress and reach standards that are broadly average. A similar improvement occurs between Year 9 and Year 11.

The unconfirmed results for the national tests taken by Year 9 in 2008 show that standards are continuing to rise in English and science. The GCSE results also show improvement. The overall results are above those found nationally while those for English and mathematics are now in line with national averages. The proportion of students who leave with five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has risen sharply in recent years, and is now also in line with national averages. Students make outstanding progress compared with similar students nationally. Those who have statements of educational needs or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress.

In 2007 the proportion of students achieving the highest grades of A and A* was well below the national average. In 2008 the proportion, while still below national figures, has doubled.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The students are friendly, polite and helpful to each other and to visitors. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students behave well in lessons and around the school, this is helped by a system of rewards as well as by students' clear understanding of what is right and wrong. The 'Proud of Passmores' (PoP!) campaign, along with the excellent opportunities for students to take responsibility, has created a sense of pride and belonging. The Bullying Task Group, a peer support team and the counselling service help the students to feel extremely safe at school. Students report that there is little bullying and when it does occur it is dealt with quickly. The mixed-age tutor time and assemblies effectively promote harmony and unity, enabling students to learn from each other, for example during a mixed age group quiz about Remembrance Day which was linked to an assembly on the topic of sacrifice.

Extending the 'Fit Club' to parents and teachers has brought benefits for community cohesion. Students meet and work with different sectors of the local community both young and old, for instance bilingual students helping neighbouring children in primary schools, and the 'Silver Surfers' Coffee Club' which helps older people to use computers. The students' participation in, and commitment to, the community are an outstanding feature.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers know their subjects well and plan interesting work that enables students to make good progress. There are high expectations of what most students will achieve and they work

hard, both independently and in groups. Questions asked by teachers are of an unusually high quality. They often are targeted at specific students ensuring that boys and girls and students from different ethnic groups are all well involved in the work. They are persistent and probing, often requiring students to think and analyse what they know, rather than simply repeating recently taught facts.

In lessons judged outstanding, dynamic, well-structured and innovative, teaching leads to higher than expected achievement. In a Year 8 music lesson, students were familiar with difficult technical language and produced clear and precise musical phrases on various percussion instruments. Good quality homework, regularly set, contributes to students' progress. The quality of marking is somewhat variable: while there is an unusually high amount which is exemplary there is a small minority which is lacking in detail or frequency.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an innovative and exciting curriculum based on different 'pathways' which provide well for the wide range of students' interests and aspirations. New initiatives such as 'flexible Fridays' allow students to explore a wide range of subjects in exciting, one-day projects. These well-structured days are popular amongst students and make valuable links between different areas of the curriculum. As a result of the school's evaluation of the curriculum, some 100 minute lessons have been introduced. These are important for practical subjects, and are well liked by students. In addition the work-based learning option, for those students who favour that style of learning, has been adapted to meet students' interests.

The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of after school clubs that are well attended. Residential trips and visits help students to understand about the community beyond Harlow. A very effective link with a school in China helps to develop a strong sense of global citizenship. Students also are aware of their national community through lessons in citizenship and a broad range of visits and visitors. An innovative approach to the teaching of foreign languages and other cultures increase students' appreciation of their place in a global society.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The exceptionally high standard of care, guidance and support contributes significantly to students' self-esteem and personal development. The school's emphasis on rewards, personal recognition and praise brings the best out of students. Teachers monitor students' progress very well and students know how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve. Support for students with additional learning needs, such as those with dyslexia, is outstanding. Vulnerable students who might otherwise be lost to education are retained in school. The welfare of students who attend college courses is closely monitored and their attendance is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous, sensible and coherent and students feel well cared for. Year 7 students found the summer school both helpful and fun in making a smooth transition from primary to secondary school. The school has taken effective measures to integrate new students in Year 10. Students benefit from extensive help when choosing their Year 10 options, and the school advises them well on the options available when they are preparing to leave.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. There is an energetic and well-focused drive for improvement that is strongly influenced by the school's outstanding evaluation processes, and by its concern that all students should prosper personally and academically. Subject departments are kept under regular review and there are detailed evaluations of each departments' work. These are largely accurate. Regular meetings between subject leaders and their managers help to ensure that planned improvements are successfully implemented. The quality of teaching is regularly evaluated. Whilst inspectors agreed with most of the school's judgements about teaching quality, there is some tendency in the school to give the actions of the teacher too much emphasis with not enough on the impact on students' learning. Where teaching is judged to be only satisfactory, good approaches are taken to improving it. The views of students, parents and teachers are regularly canvassed to identify areas of concern. These are well responded to. Two students attend meetings of the governing body. Governors know the school well, though their links with departments are somewhat under-utilised. Nevertheless, they are kept well-informed about the school's work and are active in challenging underperformance, and in planning for the school's future.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

14 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Passmores School and Technology College, Harlow, CM18 6RW

Thank you for your help when we inspected your school. We spoke to many of you and found that you were friendly and confident when speaking with adults.

We found that your school is outstanding. You make very good progress in your work. This is because your school encourages you to work hard, through the setting of regular homework, extra lessons when you need them and help for you if you fall behind. We found that teaching is good, in some cases exceptionally so. In some cases though we thought that the most able could have been challenged more in some lessons. The curriculum is well designed so that those of you who are interested in vocational or work-based learning have good opportunities and there is the possibility for those of you who learn quickly to take examinations early in some of your subjects. We were also impressed by how well your school prepares you for life beyond school through, for example, links with the local and international community.

You are well cared for. As a result, you told us that you feel very safe in school, though there is a little bullying it is dealt with quickly. We saw that your behaviour is good, and were pleased to hear from you and your parents that you enjoy school a lot. Despite this, attendance is satisfactory rather than good.

Your school is very well-led by the headteacher and his team. They work hard, along with the rest of the staff, to find out how to help you to learn and prosper. We are suggesting two areas for improvement. The first is to help some of you to attend more regularly. Perhaps you can all try to encourage this. The second is to make sure that those of you who work quickly are more challenged in some lessons.

I wish you well for your future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder

Her Majesty's Inspector